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C O N F I D E N T I A L ULAANBAATAR 000160

STATE FOR EAP/CM, NSC FOR JEFF BADER

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SUBJECT: BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY FOR MONGOLIAN PRESIDENT-ELECT
ELBEGDORJ

Classified By: Political Chief Andrew Covington, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Born to herders in western Mongolia, Harvard-educated President-elect Elbegdorj worked in a factory, studied journalism in Russia, and wrote for Mongolia's army newspaper before becoming a leader in the country's democratic movement in the late 1980s. Since the country's democratization in 1990, he has been elected to Parliament four times and served twice as the country's Prime Minister. Elbegdorj is a political survivor who, despite numerous setbacks, has played a vital role in sculpting Mongolia's political system. End Summary.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

¶2. (SBU) Elbegdorj was born in March 1963 in Khovd Aimag, the youngest of eight sons born to Tsakhia and Khoninkhuu. His family - Zakhchins, a Mongolian ethnic minority - worked as herders before moving to the northern city of Erdenet when Elbegdorj was sixteen. After finishing high school, he worked at the Erdenet copper mine for a year before beginning his mandatory military service in 1982. During his military service, Elbegdorj submitted poems to the army newspaper - Ulaan Od (Red Star) - that so impressed his superiors that they awarded him a scholarship to study at the Military Political Institute of the USSR in Lviv, Ukraine. He received his B.A. in military journalism in 1988 and returned to Mongolia to work for the army newspaper.

GOLDEN SWALLOW OF DEMOCRACY

¶3. (SBU) In 1989, at the age of 26, Elbegdorj became one of thirteen early leaders of Mongolia's underground pro-democracy movement and a founder of the Mongolian Democratic Union. Elbegdorj and other activists organized demonstrations, protests, and hunger strikes during the winter of 1989-1990, ultimately rallying enough public support to force the resignation of the country's Politburo in March 1990. That same year, Elbegdorj founded Mongolia's first independent newspaper, "Ardchilal" (Democracy) and served as the paper's editor-in-chief.

¶4. (SBU) Elbegdorj was elected to the country's first Parliament in 1990 and helped to sculpt Mongolia's new constitution, which was ratified on January 13, 1992. Mongolian supporters refer to Elbegdorj as the "Golden Swallow of Democracy," alluding to a bird that comes with spring sunshine after a long, harsh winter.

¶5. (C) Elbegdorj was elected to Parliament again in 1992 and 1996 and, as head of the Democratic Party (DP), helped lead the Democratic Union Coalition to its historic victory over the formerly communist Mongolia People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) in the 1996 parliamentary elections. He served as

Vice Speaker of Parliament from 1996 to 1998 and was elected Prime Minister in April 1998, but the weak Democratic coalition dissolved and Elbegdorj resigned from his position as Prime Minister under political pressure in December 1998. With the Democratic coalition fragmented, the MPRP won an overwhelming victory in the 2000 parliamentary election.

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES WITH U.S.

¶6. (SBU) Following a demoralizing loss in the 2000 parliamentary election, Elbegdorj and many of his DP compatriots received scholarships to study in the U.S. He studied at the University of Colorado at Boulder's Economic Institute from 2000-2001, then attended Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, graduating with a Master's of Public Administration in 2002.

¶7. (SBU) Elbegdorj has expressed positive views of the U.S. and supported his government's decision to send Mongolian peacekeepers to Iraq and Afghanistan. In late 2001, he wrote, "John F. Kennedy became a Berliner, and I know on September 11, 2001, we became New Yorkers."

¶8. (SBU) As Prime Minister, Elbegdorj also promoted the use of English as the key foreign language in Mongolian schools (replacing Russian).

RETURN TO POLITICS

¶9. (SBU) Elbegdorj made his return to politics in 2004, when he emerged as a compromise candidate for prime minister following the 2004 parliamentary election (NOTE: Elbegdorj did not run for a parliamentary seat in 2004 and was therefore not a member of the 2004-2008 Parliament. END NOTE). He was elected by Parliament in 2004 to preside over a cabinet split between the Motherland-Democracy Coalition and the MPRP. His second stint as Prime Minister lasted from 2004-2006, when the coalition government collapsed. He continued to serve as DP leader from 2006-2008.

¶10. (SBU) Elbegdorj was elected to Parliament again in June 2008 in a contentious election that resulted in a violent protest, fraud allegations, and stalemate. Elbegdorj resigned his position as head of the DP in August 2008, but was seated as an MP in September 2008 and was selected as the DP's presidential nominee at the party's convention in March ¶2009.

TIGHT-KNIT, LOW-PROFILE FAMILY

¶11. (SBU) Elbegdorj met and married Khajidsuren BOLORMAA while studying in the Soviet Union. Bolormaa was born in January 1965 in Ulaanbaatar, earned a Bachelor's Degree in engineering from Lviv State University, and studied hygiene methodology at the National College of Business and Technology in Roanoke, Virginia. She is involved with local charity work, including her Bolor Foundation, which works with local orphans. Though supportive of her husband's career, Bolormaa keeps a low profile and rarely appeared at political events with her husband during his stints as Prime Minister or during his presidential campaign. Bolormaa speaks fluent English and Russian.

¶12. (SBU) The couple has four sons and one daughter. Their eldest son, Orgil, is 23 years old and a PhD student at Virginia Commonwealth University. Erdene, 20, is a sophomore biology major at Drexel University. Their two youngest sons (Tserendorj, 10, and Tsend, 8) and their daughter (Anuujin, 16) are students at the American School of Ulaanbaatar. Tsend was born in the U.S. when his father was studying at Harvard, according to Embassy contacts. Anuujin was adopted from a local orphanage.

¶13. (C) Although Elbegdorj's family did not play a visible role in most of his campaign, televised interviews with his wife and mother gave him a final boost during the 2009 presidential election. Both women publicly countered MPRP allegations that Elbegdorj's paternal grandfather had immigrated to Monoglia from China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region. In an emotional segment, Elbegdorj asked his mother about his ancestry and she assured him that his ancestors were, indeed, Mongols from Khovd Aimag.

THE HERDERS' SON TURNED POLITICIAN

¶14. (C) Embassy contacts have described Elbegdorj's countryside roots as being critical to both his own self-perception and the way he is perceived by fellow Mongolians. In addition to being a battle between long-time political rivals, the 2009 campaign pitted Enkhbayar, perceived as a well-educated elite, against Elbegdorj, who - despite his Harvard MPA - is seen by urban Mongolians as less sophisticated.

¶15. (C) Elbegdorj's rural roots may, however, have given him a boost in rural areas, an MPRP stronghold; Enkhbayar did win the rural vote, but with a smaller margin than expected. During the campaign, the DP candidate exhibited pride in his rural upbringing; campaign commercials showed him riding a horse across the steppe (the same commercial showed Enkhbayar on a horse that fell to the ground) and he aired an interview with his mother, a prototypical countryside grandmother. Residents of the large ger districts surrounding Ulaanbaatar, Erdenet, and other Mongolian cities also consist of migrants from the countryside and probably contributed to Elbegdorj's overwhelming victories in urban areas.

SUSPICIOUS CAR ACCIDENT; TIES TO BATTULGA

¶16. (C) Elbegdorj was injured in a July 2007 car accident that killed his driver. Press questioned the circumstances surrounding the accident, suggesting that the accident was actually a failed assassination attempt. Rumors intensified when former DP Prime Minister and then-New National Party MP ¶J. Narantsatsralt was killed in a car accident two months later, but police never conducted a formal investigation.

¶17. (C) According to Embassy contacts, then-DP MP and current Minister of Construction, City Planning, Roads, and Transportation Kh. Battulga paid for Elbegdorj's medical expenses, including treatment in South Korea. Ambassador Minton called on Elbegdorj at his hospital in Ulaanbaatar four days after the accident and found him in bed but with no visible or apparent physical injuries. He was fully alert and able to converse in English in a normal manner throughout the Ambassador's 20-minute call. The MPRP suggested during the 2009 presidential campaign that Elbegdorj had mental problems stemming from the car accident, but doctors at a mental hospital gave him a clean bill of health.

OUTGOING, SOCIAL, AND FRIENDLY

¶18. (SBU) Embassy employees who have met with Elbegdorj describe him as an outgoing, humble person who is comfortable in almost any social setting and is friendly with interlocutors, regardless of rank or status.

¶19. (SBU) Contacts also describe Elbegdorj as a risk-taker and someone who puts others' needs before his own; a long-time Embassy employee recalls Elbegdorj accompanying Embassy officials on a trip to deliver humanitarian assistance to the countryside during a winter disaster in the 1990s. The road was snowed under, and Elbegdorj volunteered to go ahead to check for alternate routes, despite freezing

conditions and deep snow.

120. (U) Elbegdorj speaks Russian and English.

MINTON